



I look back

*Photograph by Anthea Sieveking*

THE EYE  
OF THE BEHOLDER

*Lance Sieveking*



LONDON  
HULTON PRESS  
1957

By the same author



*Novels*

A PRIVATE VOLCANO  
A TOMB WITH A VIEW  
THE WOMAN SHE WAS  
SILENCE IN HEAVEN  
SMITE AND SPARE NOT  
THE PERFECT WITCH  
THE ULTIMATE ISLAND  
ALL CHILDREN MUST BE PAID FOR  
STAMPEDE  
(illustrated by G. K. Chesterton)

*Belles Lettres*

NORTH AMERICAN BINOCULAR  
THE STUFF OF RADIO  
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FLYING  
BEYOND THIS POINT

*Light Verse*

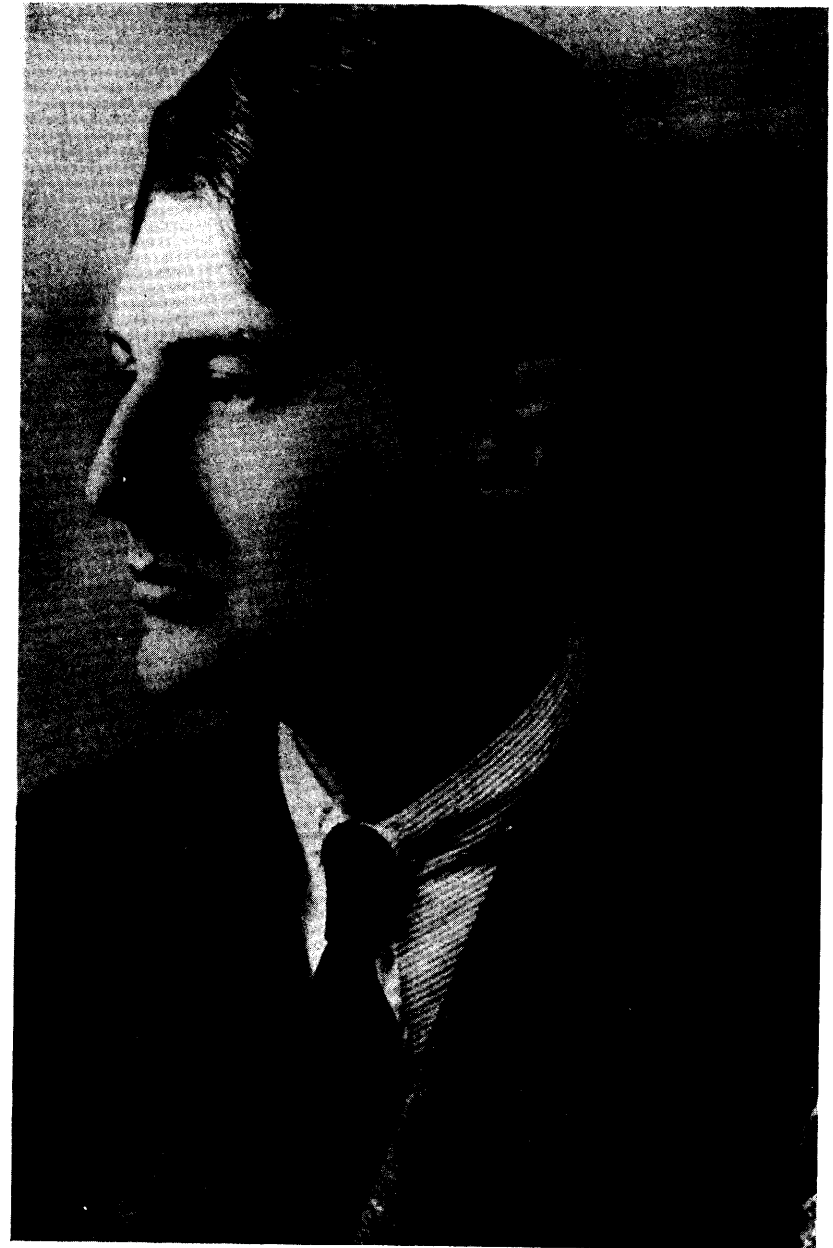
BATS IN THE BELFRY  
(illustrated by John Nash)  
THE GUD  
DRESSING GOWNS AND GLUE

*Drama*

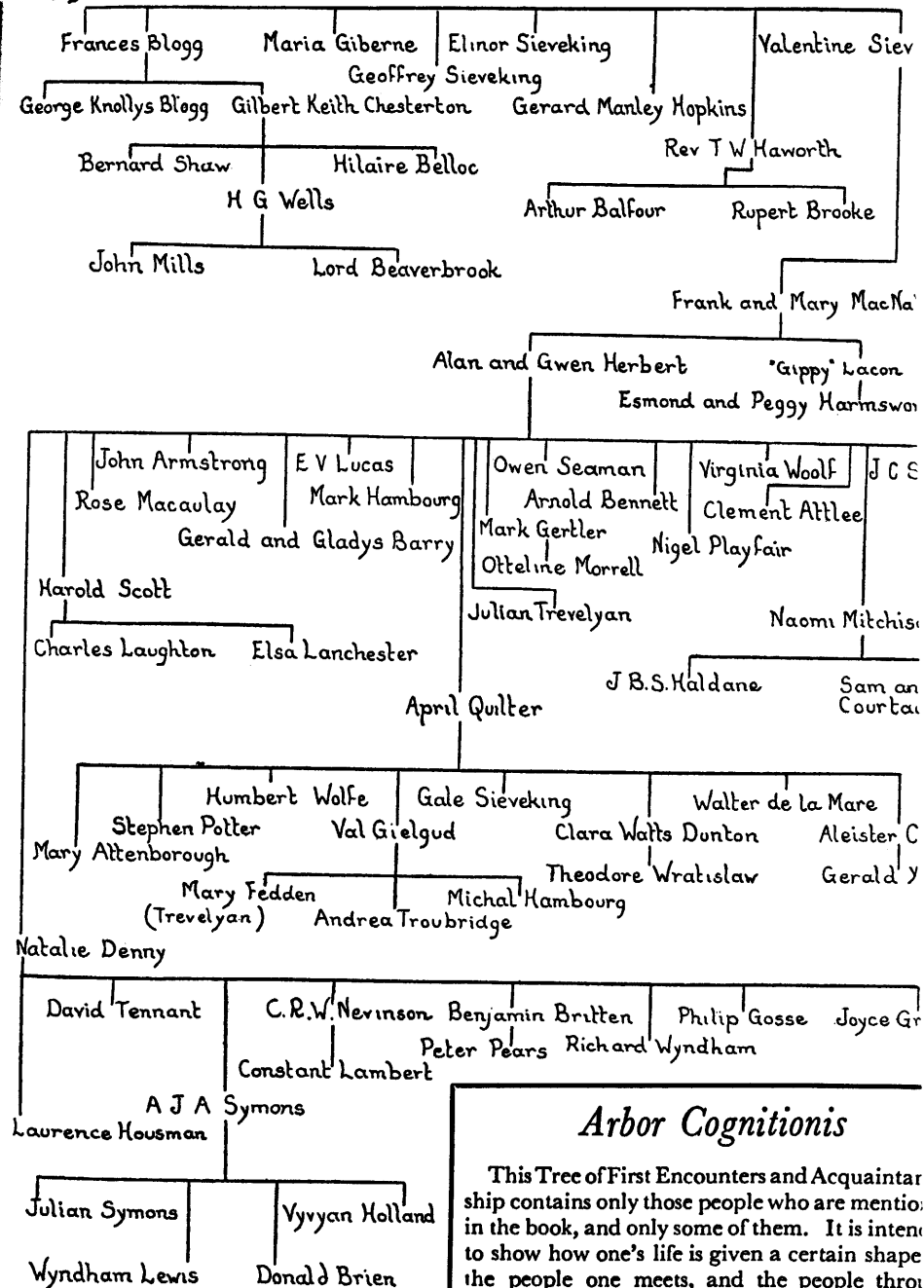
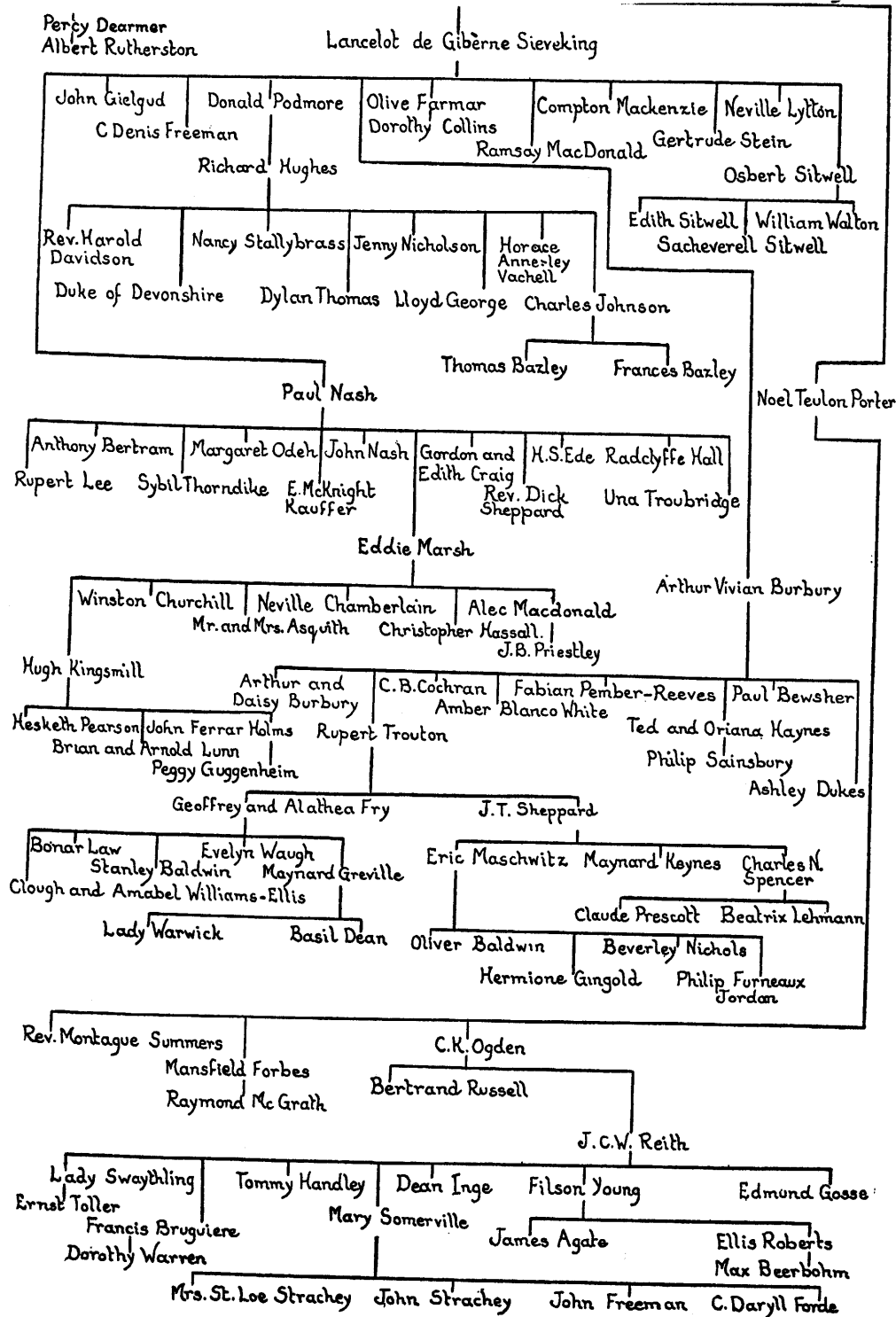
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BUSINESS IS BUSINESS  
THE PROPHETIC CAMERA  
NEW ENGLISH VERSION OF HENRIK IBSEN'S  
GHOSTS  
ETC.

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THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE  
THE END OF SAVOY HILL  
KALEIDOSCOPE  
INTIMATE SNAPSHOTS  
THE SEA IN A SHELL  
A VOYAGE TO LILLIPUT  
THE SEVEN AGES OF MECHANICAL MUSIC  
AN ECHO FROM THE MOON  
THE CHARMING YOUNG MAN  
ADAPTATIONS OF H. G. WELLS'S HISTORY OF  
MR. POLLY, AND KIPPS  
ETC.



Myself aged 24



## Arbor Cognitionis

This Tree of First Encounters and Acquaintance contains only those people who are mentioned in the book, and only some of them. It is intended to show how one's life is given a certain shape by the people one meets, and the people through whom one meets them.

As, necessarily, some of the intervening links are omitted, some of the people in the Tree may be rather surprised to learn for which of my encounters they were responsible. They will, I hope, excuse certain informality. The index is strictly for

For  
Maisie,  
who has made my life  
worth living

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*I*

THE BEHOLDER

THE latest stage in my education has just come to an end, and I have emerged from my long retirement behind the walls of the Enclosed Order under whose benevolent rule I have spent the last thirty years. Very little is known by the general public about this institution beyond the initials of its name: B.B.C. The years I passed in its peaceful and secluded courts went all too quickly.

I am well aware that sixty may seem a ridiculously early age at which to write anything of an autobiographical nature, and I shall not be surprised, therefore, if the reader, at this point, throws the book down with an impatient exclamation. However, though the time has been short, it has made good use of me, and during the years between 1896 and 1956 my school life has been varied and exciting. My first thirty years were in some ways more varied than my second thirty years, and in them I met a number of men and women whose names and personalities are familiar to everyone.

I will present some of them here exactly as *I* saw them. The idea is to make an entirely individual contribution to the portrait of the person already partially painted by a number of other hands. No two people see a man or a woman from *precisely* the same angle. It is all in the eye of the beholder. A 3D picture of a man, a truly stereoscopic portrait-in-the-round, would include every individual "*shot*" that had been taken of him by all those who had known him, for each would add a fraction to the portrait. Some knew him when he was eight, some when he was eighty, and some in the years between. Possibly he himself has written an autobiography. Possibly, also, like Jeremy Bentham's, his embalmed body may be available for our contemplation. And if sound has been added to the silent picture, in a recording of his voice (that most revealing of all one's characteristics), then we have the truest report of him, the most complete portrait possible.

remaining industriously at his table for many hours a day that he was able to support his new family. But he was always unfailingly cheerful and optimistic.

I saw Holms for the last time in the summer of 1928. My wife had fallen in love with another man and left me. The shock had made me ill, and I was unable to think clearly. It was not that my heart was broken, but rather that having been conventionally brought up I had never for a moment conceived that such a thing could ever happen to *me*. I was given long leave from the B.B.C., and wandered down to St. Tropez to recover. Before I had been there an hour I came on John Holms and his wife sitting in a café on the quay overlooking the harbour. She had the same red hair as Holms and her colouring was the same. I had first met her seven years earlier when they were camping in a tiny flat in Chancery Lane on one of their rare visits to England.

One day I told Holms about my trouble, and showed him a letter from my wife which I was quite unable to answer. With the utmost understanding and sympathy he drafted a reply for me, which, with one slight alteration, I sent. It was a letter of gentle and unreproachful phrases such as I could not at that time have written for myself, and it carried a message of quiet, kindly reasonableness amounting almost to generosity. I copied it out and sent it under the spell of Holms's certainty that it was the only right letter in the circumstances—which, on looking back, it was. I still have both letters—my wife's passionate scrawl of appeal and John Holms's little half-sheet covered with his curious backward sloping handwriting.

I stayed at St. Tropez for several weeks before I went on to Cassis where I met Aleister Crowley. I made friends with a charming girl. She and I and the Holmses spent a lot of time lazing in the sunshine. In the evenings we used to go from café to café until they closed. About two o'clock one morning, everyone else having gone to bed, we four strolled down to the harbour in the moonlight. The fishing-fleet had set sail, and one last *tartane* (as those little fishing vessels are called) was just about to put out to sea. John Holms hailed the captain and asked if we could come with him. The sailor's magnificent teeth shone in the moonlight as he grinned and shouted a welcoming assent. We climbed on board, and sailed away across the calm Mediterranean to an unknown destination. Rather drunk and very contented, we did

not trouble to ask where the boat was going or when, if ever, it would be back at St. Tropez. All we knew was that the night was warm and full of moonlight. We watched the swarthy fishermen move about, and exchanged a few words with them. They seemed to take our presence as the most natural thing in the world, and when, presently, overcome with sleep, we went and lay down on the small decked-in space in the bows, they came quietly and laid blankets over us. For a time Holms murmured poems, or pieces of poems to himself, but at last he slept.

When we awoke, the dawn was just breaking and, looking round, propped on our elbows, we saw that we were anchored within a few yards of a shore composed entirely of the finest golden sand for miles in either direction. The rest of the fleet of about twenty *tartanes* were similarly anchored, and each had two long planks lashed to its side, that sloped down into the shallow water.

Holms and I stood up and watched the busy scene. The sailors had stripped and their bodies were dark brown all over. They each had a tall Etruscan-shaped basket, and a wooden spade with a heart-shaped blade and an enormously long handle. In a continuous stream they ran down one plank, filled their baskets with the fine sand, dropped the spade, and, with the full basket balanced on one shoulder, ran up the other plank to empty it. The planks bounced up and down under their bare feet.

For a long time Holms and I stood side by side watching them in wonder. The girls still slept.

At last Holms whispered:

"Tyre and Sidon—Tyre and Sidon, that's what it is."

And indeed there was nothing in sight anywhere in the landscape to tell us we were not in the world of six thousand years ago.

The sun began to rise over the edge of the world, and immediately the delicious cool of the air began to be warmer. In a little while it would be fiercely hot. The girls woke, and the captain brought us a leather bottle of harsh Corsican wine and huge hunks of bread and cheese. He was busy and had no time for talk.

When we had breakfasted, the day was already beginning to be too hot and, after having expressed our gratitude, we swayed down one of the planks, supported by powerful brown hands, and stood on the shore, surveying the scene the other way round. Then it occurred to

I hoped he would not be bored by the question. And if he refused to explain I hoped he would do so by pulling my leg (not for the first time)—that it would be a case of *on se moque de ce qu'on aime* rather than the reverse.

But he is dead, and we shall never know what was that aid "of the most curious kind imaginable".

ALEISTER CROWLEY

IN the Easter term of 1922 a number of people crossed streets or rooms to put the same question to me. I was then in my second year at Cambridge. Though, owing to having been on active service throughout the war I was five years older than is usual for undergraduates, I was still as innocent as most undergraduates of eighteen. I use the word innocent in its sense of artless and guileless. Unkind people might have said I was naïve in the sense of being foolishly simple. This was the form the question usually took:

"I say, *do* tell me about Aleister Crowley! What sort of man is he really? Have you seen him lately?"

I had never heard the name before, and, on the first two or three occasions, simply assumed that there had been a slip of the tongue either about my name or Crowley's. The thing that did strike me from the first as odd, was the evident disappointment and even suspicion my denials obviously caused. However, one man was more persistent.

"Surely you know him, don't you? *He* appears to know *you*."

"Really? Did he tell you so?"

"It's in his new book. Get it and see for yourself."

The speaker looked at me sceptically. As if I hadn't seen the book! he was visibly thinking.

Five minutes later I went into Heffer's bookshop and bought *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* by Aleister Crowley, just published by Collins. On page 24 I came on a paragraph beginning: "I suppose everyone has read *The Psychology of Flying* by L. de Giberne Sieveking;" and going on to quote passages out of that rather harmless, woolly work. Apparently this and other references had led to the assumption that Crowley and I knew each other. There was a certain amount of unpleasantness caused by my continued assertion that, far from

knowing the man, I had never even heard of him. One elderly lady, a great Cambridge "character", openly went about saying that I was afraid to admit knowing Crowley because I knew him only too well, and had taken part in all sorts of fun and games, some of which were so near the wind as practically to sail us into the dock. She and I had quite a scene about this.

If I hadn't been quite so guileless I might have got a good deal of amusement out of my supposed acquaintanceship with that fantastic and sinister figure. I didn't, however, perceive this. I merely felt affronted by the nerve of this Crowley fellow who had bandied my name about in his beastly book. For it *was* a beastly book. Not so much because of its subject, but because of the writing. I am far from prim; indeed, I can think of no subject which I consider unfit to be written about. It was Crowley's *style* that I did not care for. It was confidential and, at moments, even matey; and then suddenly it was incomprehensible gibberish.

*O thou red cobra of desire that art  
unhooded by the hands of girls! I adore  
thee, Evoe! I adore thee, I.A.O.!*

Well, I supposed that one could attach a sort of meaning, if meaning there had to be. As for Evoe, I had only come across the name as a contributor to *Punch*, surely an unlikely avenue of inquiry. And as for I.A.O. . . .

I tried to read the book, but chiefly, owing to the writing, I became so bored that I couldn't go on. People were always chanting ecstatically such remarks as: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" and "Love is the law, love under Will." They were all having a wonderful time as far as one could make out, but Crowley's writing was not skilful enough to evoke and convey the atmospheres and sensations with which he tried to excite his readers. As for myself, I found it all rather silly. But then I had never taken cocaine or any drug of that kind, and had no conception of the states of mind they are able to induce. In *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* the characters became gradually more and more drugged, ecstatic, inflamed, and utterly unintelligible. It seemed to me that one would have to be in a similiar state to know what it was all about, in which case, presumably, one would be too occupied with one's own sensations to

want to read a description of them. I therefore concluded that the author and his publisher were unlikely to make a profit, for, whatever it was about, as far as the average reader was concerned it was largely abracadabra and mysterious hints. If it was what we used to call "lovely old pornoggers", no one I met managed to get one solitary kick out of it. I was not tempted to change my attitude and pretend that, after all, I *did* know this extraordinary person, this self-styled Beast 666 of the Book of Revelation.

My feelings were shared by someone who enjoyed the reputation of being an authority on magic, black and otherwise. He was the Rev. Montague Summers, who had written much about the *Black Mass* and about witchcraft generally. The first time I saw him was at *The Half Moon*, Noel Porter's delightful converted pub in Little St. Mary's Lane.

"He's an R.C. priest, I think," said my friend Alec Macdonald, as we approached the door. "Or rather was. I believe he's been de-bagged or de-bunked or whatever you call it."

"Unfrocked?" I suggested.

But unfrocked or no, he was still wearing his cassock and biretta that afternoon. He was of middle height and had a fat round white face with large, protruding round eyes. His hands were pudgy and very white. He had an over-elegant consciously stylish way of talking.

As we walked in, Noel Porter had just mentioned, mischievously, the name of someone known to all of us.

Montague Summers's bulbous eyes gleamed maliciously. He delicately fingered the cord of his cassock and said in a fastidious voice:

"He was begotten by a pair of warm trousers on a bed of nettles."

When I was introduced to him a phrase I had heard somewhere floated into my head: "The man with green hair, whose touch is paralysis."

I asked him what he thought of Aleister Crowley. His interest was immediately aroused, but it sank again when I confessed that I didn't know him. I pressed him to tell me something about the man whom everyone assumed I knew, and since he was one of those people who love to hear themselves speaking, Montague Summers said quite a lot about Aleister Crowley, who, it appeared, he knew quite well, and in whose company he had attended many a sabbat. It seemed that they were both honorary members of several of the best covens of witches. I

wish I had written down what he said while it was fresh in my mind. Now all I can recall is a jumble of esoteric words and a general impression that he didn't think much of Aleister Crowley as a magician. Crowley was on the right track, it seemed, but was always trying to introduce all manner of things that did not properly belong to "The Old Religion", as witchcraft was called. Witches, apparently, were very conventional, doctrinaire characters, and disapproved of the slightest departure from the traditional rubric. However, Crowley was quite sound on Baphomet, unbaptised babies for sacrificial purposes, familiars, and the ritual of the pentagram generally.

In other words, the whole thing was double-Dutch to me. It passed completely out of my mind and Aleister Crowley along with it.

In the following year Eric Maschwitz, Philip Furneaux Jordan, and I took a villa together on the Ile de Porquerolles in the Mediterranean in order to write in peace. One day someone sent us a copy of the *Sunday Express*. The front page carried a large photograph of Aleister Crowley, full face. I was immediately struck by his resemblance to Oscar Browning, whom I had met in 1912. The other day I compared a number of photographs of both of them. Beyond the fact that they both, in middle age, had fat pouchy faces on which were written every sign of self-indulgence and self-complacency combined with an indefinable air of arrogant resentment, their faces were not so closely alike as I had thought. It was one of those cases where the character that was plainly visible had produced a facial resemblance that was, in a way, more pronounced than can be seen in faces which are only superficially alike. They were both men of ineffable vanity and egotism. Both *looked* as if they had worn their bodies out with every kind of physical indulgence; both had reduced their spirits to a pathological condition of unease and disharmony by a basically foolish outlook on life. Both were snobs of the most ludicrous sort. Both had a set of values which one would have expected in the chief of a cannibal tribe, but which was more than a little disconcerting in men who had been born and brought up in nineteenth-century England.

And yet both made themselves most agreeable to me. At sixteen, and still, at thirty-two, I was unable to perceive a *faux bonhomme*. I have learned a lot since then. . . .

The story in the *Sunday Express* described Crowley's "Abbey" at Cefalu, near Palermo. Here, said Betty May, one of Epstein's models,

Crowley, in the character of "The Beast" was the High Priest, and conducted all manner of "nameless rites". Eric Maschwitz, Philip Jordan, and I were naturally disappointed at the namelessness of these unnatural rites. True there was a fairly satisfactory account of how a cat had been sacrificed. But the death of Betty May's youthful husband Raoul Loveday at Cefalu was, we felt, most inadequately dealt with by saying that it took place in "mysterious circumstances". There was too much play with the assertion that Betty May was known in artistic circles in London as "Tiger Woman", and far too little about what the worshippers actually *did* at Evening Pentagram. We wanted more about sacrificial knives, strangely obscene oaths, and madly indecent behaviour. Looking at the photograph of Crowley, we were ready to believe that he was possessed of remarkable hypnotic powers and that, having got a virgin or some silly young man into a trance, there were no lengths to which he would not go.

As the *Sunday Express* was so reticent, we set to work inventing rites which were far from nameless—which were indeed full of very specific detail. In the end I invented a rite that so shocked and revolted Eric and Philip that the subject had to be dropped. But not before we had half-seriously discussed the notion of going down to Cefalu from Porquerolles and calling on The Beast in the same spirit as a party of undergraduates from Cambridge, when Eric and I were up, had one Sunday made a pilgrimage to the village church of the Rev. E. E. Bradford, whose strange poems had aroused their ribald curiosity.\*

But next day we were back at our tables, industriously writing our novels.

Once again I forgot all about Aleister Crowley. That was in 1923.

In 1928 my wife went off with another man, and I went to North Wales, where for a time, as I have described, I stayed alone in a lonely cottage belonging to Richard Hughes.

My leave from the B.B.C. having still some weeks to run, I took myself to a place in the South of France whose name had attracted me—St. Tropez. I put up at l'Hôtel du Sube. I wondered at the time what a *sube* could be, and I have never found out. A painter from Glasgow who was staying there suggested that it was a word like ponce. "*Il n'est qu'un sube, ce type*. You can almost hear them saying it,

\* Rev. E. E. Bradford, D.D., author of *The Tree of Knowledge, Passing the Love of Women* etc., Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co.

can't you?" he said. I deposited my luggage in a pleasant bedroom overlooking the port, and went for a stroll along the quayside. Almost at once I saw the familiar figure of John Holms. He was sitting, elegantly sprawled at a café table. It was a disappointment when he told me that our great friend Hugh Kingsmill had left St. Tropez a week or so earlier. I'd have given a lot to find Hughie there. However, Holms was an excellent substitute, and, as I have described in another chapter, was able to do me a great and necessary service, connected with my wife, who was, at that moment, still legally my wife.

After a week or two in the pleasant company of the Holmes I left St. Tropez and moved along the coast to Cassis. I have given the details of what brought me to Cassis because they are important. Had I gone straight there instead of having to a great extent restored my mental balance first in Richard Hughes's absent company in his very personal cottage, and then at St. Tropez talking to Holms, the results of my encounter with Aleister Crowley at Cassis might have been very different from what they were. But by that time a certain hereditary common sense had reasserted itself, and I was safe. I was proof against magicians. Looking back, I can see that it wasn't a broken heart or anything like that that I was suffering from. Indeed, there was, among other things, a sense of release and relief. But that is a long story. The actual *shock* had been to my conventionality. For I was (and, to my own amusement, still am) profoundly conventional. I thought: "That *this* should have happened to *me*!" The "broken heart" explanation of my state was taken for granted by everyone and I was too upset to argue. It was simplest to let it go at that. . . .

I took my seat at a little table by a window in the *salle-à-manger* of the hotel at Cassis, and began my luncheon. Looking about, I saw, two tables away, a fat man sitting with his back to me. Facing him was an even fatter woman. Before long she observed me and I saw her saying something to her companion which made him look round. He smiled at me and slightly inclined his head, which caused his stomach to rise slightly and then drop back. I gave him a faint bow.

When coffee arrived, he got up and came over to me.

"May I sit down?" he asked in a slightly cockney voice.

"Do," I replied.

He pulled back a chair.

"Are you alone?"

"Completely."

His face expanded into a smile of satisfaction and he moistened his fleshy lips with his tongue. I noticed that several teeth were missing. He discoursed on the charm of Cassis, comparing it favourably with Southern Italy, from where he had lately come. (He had, in fact, been expelled, but I didn't know this.) As he talked I was surprised to see that his tongue was strangely fat and swollen, and of a peculiar dark purple in colour, quite different from the dull red of his lips. The round dome of his head was completely bald but for three long black hairs of unusual thickness which stood up like ferns from the top of the dome. His ears were very large and, except that they did not hang downwards, reminded me of elephants' ears. His face, though it was deeply sunburnt, was actually more green than brown. Under his eyes were deep saucers of black. His skin, which, though the face was fat, was loose in a fat sort of way, moved as he talked as an elephant's skin moves. The texture, too, reminded me of an elephant's skin.

So completely had I forgotten all about his name and personality that I was quite taken aback when, with an obese flourish, he produced a wallet and, extracting a visiting-card, handed it to me. On it was engraved:

*Sir Aleister Crowley*

*Cefalu, Sicily.*

I glanced from the card to the man, and back again at the card. Then suddenly I remembered all about him and was astonished that I hadn't recognised him.

"I didn't know that you had been knighted," I said. He made a shrugging gesture with a fat hand on which was an enormous gold ring engraved with hieroglyphs.

"It is merely a free translation of the title of Chevalier that the King of Spain conferred on me. I find it more useful in this form."

I resolved not to address him as "Sir Aleister". Indeed, during my stay at Cassis, I never used his name in any form. By and by we went over to his table and he introduced me to the fat lady. She greeted me effusively but withdrew immediately from the conversation, giving me a distinct impression of leaving her companion to deal with me unhindered. Crowley wore a rather crumpled pair of white cotton trousers, a pale mauve shirt, and sandals. The fat lady had a summer dress

of Edwardian style. They didn't look exactly shabby, but they did not look prosperous. I remembered Eric's *Chevalier sans beurre et sans brioche*.

That afternoon we all bathed in the sea. The Beast and his disciple were remarkable figures in their bathing-costumes, and the other people on the beach made remarks and pointed at them. This seemed to please Crowley. I noticed that his body was like his face, sunburned all over, but green. I wondered if this was caused by some rare (and nameless) drug which he took, and decided that at all events this must be the reason for his tongue being swollen and purple.

They surged into the warm sea and floated there like two balloons, occasionally making a single stroke and then relapsing into inactivity. They stayed in the water for at least half an hour.

That evening on the terrace of the hotel we sat smoking and drinking. They drank brandy, but I, disliking brandy, contented myself with the local wine. At one point I reminded him that six years earlier he had quoted passages from my *Psychology of Flying* in his novel *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*. This gave him the opening he was looking for.

"Ah," he answered, "did I? You're a writer. Of course. Somehow I didn't connect you with that Sieveking. Well, well. Tell me, have you published a lot since then?"

He tried to sound like a genial elderly man taking an interest in a young hopeful, while carefully avoiding a patronising note. But it was soon obvious that he meant to find out all about me, particularly if I was well off. Even when I told him that I was on the staff of the B.B.C. he still had hopes, and said that no doubt I had private means as well. I let this pass and asked him what he thought of the Rev. Montague Summers.

"I haven't seen Monty Summers for years," answered Crowley, knocking the end off his cigar with an air of an executioner. "He takes care of that. He knows what would happen."

"What would happen?"

"I should change him into a toad."

At this, almost as if it were a prearranged cue, the stout lady rose and, wishing me good night, left us. It was only about ten o'clock, and the moon had not risen. Crowley began a monologue which lasted, with occasional interruptions from me, until after one next morning.

He was well into his stride when the moon rose into the deep purple Mediterranean sky, and the sounds from below on the quay had quietened to a distant murmur. At one point he sat quite silent for a long time, looking fixedly at me. I thought: Is he trying to hypnotise me? But I felt nothing. Then he closed his eyes and clenched his fists as if in a great effort of concentration.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, at length, opening his eyes and relaxing, "I was just controlling one of my projections."

"Oh," I responded politely, wondering which particular projection he was referring to. There were several visible on his person.

"I am, at this moment," he explained seriously, "an old woman on the Channel boat that is about to dock at Folkestone. Round my waist, under my clothes, is a hollow belt entirely filled with cocaine. I shall have to concentrate again when I am passing through the Customs."

The mention earlier, of Montague Summers, had reminded him of some of the more celebrated people he had known. He began to talk of Horatio Bottomley, Lord Northcliffe, Sis Basil Zaharoff, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and other highly developed personalities with whom he had come in contact. Often, it seemed, the contact had been more of a collision. I sat there, glass in hand, gazing out over the purple Mediterranean, shining darkly here and there in the moonlight, and listened as Crowley talked and talked and talked. Much of what he said was incomprehensible to me. He had an air of treating me as though I were an initiate in his cult. I got a general impression of magical occasions when Immensely Powerful Influences had been invoked, and much damage had been done to enemies, to the great satisfaction of The Beast and his disciples. One way and another he seemed to have been wronged by a good many people in different parts of the world, and to have been magically successful in paying them out.

I found it a little difficult to understand therefore, when he said:

"My one great principle in all these affairs is to take no active steps whatever. That is the secret of the greatest power: *complete* inaction."

He gazed fixedly into the night, and then in a deep, reverberating voice he said slowly:

"If you want to find the men who have crossed my path—the men who have wronged me, you have but three places in which to look: the jail, the madhouse, and the grave."

I was greatly impressed and began checking over in my head the names of some of his enemies whom he had mentioned.

Before I left Cassis, Crowley asked me to help him, if I could, to arrange for the publication of some of his works that had not already appeared. For this purpose he gave me an introduction to one Gerald Yorke, at Number 9 Mansfield Street, to whom I telephoned on my return to England. At my request he sent me the manuscript of an unpublished novel by Crowley, which I took round to show to Vivian Burbury. I told Viv I was rather worried about the young man. Perhaps he was seriously under Crowley's influence. I asked Viv to come with me and give his opinion. A few days later we went.

Mansfield Street leads out of Cavendish Square and is composed of very fine eighteenth-century houses, large, majestic and gloomy. I felt that it was a perfect setting for anything to do with the great Black Magician. Number 9 was indeed just such a house as Dr. Jekyll must have lived in, and, from time to time, Mr. Hyde.

Viv was in the Diplomatic Corps, and at that time was working at the Foreign Office. He was and still is a connoisseur of strange experiences, and just the man to have with you if you aren't quite sure of what may happen. He is large, powerful, and speaks eighteen languages. Also he had brought a naturally baffling manner to such a pitch of perfection that no one who meets him for the first time is able to make a single correct guess about him.

It wasn't that I was in any way nervous. Why should I be? It was merely because I wanted to involve Viv in the fantastic affair. I knew that his zest would increase my own enjoyment a hundredfold.

We agreed that he should be anonymous. I would present him as "Mr. B.", explaining that he was at the Foreign Office, and always conducted all his business as "Mr. B."

We rang the bell and waited. After a long time the enormous front door was opened by a tall man of about my own age.

"Come in," said Mr. Yorke, for it was he. "You are Mr. Sieveking?" he asked, looking at Viv.

Viv adjusted his monocle, and in his part of mystery man, shook his head and silently indicated me. Mr. Yorke shut the front door and led us along a wide stone-flagged hall to a room at the back of the house. Again I had a Dr. Jekyll feeling, and the house seemed very silent.

"I am alone," said Mr. Yorke. "My uncle and all the servants are away. Won't you introduce your friend?"

Viv and he shook hands, and a puzzled expression came into our host's face. He seemed faintly irritated by the lack of anything more specific than "Mr. B.". However, he let it pass and was soon showing us a great pile of manuscripts by Crowley, and explaining what they were. We turned them over, and asked a number of questions. Before long I felt that there was something about us that Mr. Yorke found displeasing. Possibly it was that Viv was slightly overplaying his part. He would gaze at Mr. Yorke through his monocle and then murmur something in Danish or Russian, break off with, "Sorry, I was forgetting", and then launch into a long sentence, full of parentheses that led nowhere. He spoke very slowly, so slowly in fact that he seemed to be going to sleep.

I knew perfectly well that he was pulling *my* leg as well as that of Mr. Yorke, but there was nothing I could do, short of making an explanation which would have sounded more confusing than what it set out to explain. At last Mr. Yorke exclaimed to me:

"What's all the mystery about? Who is your friend, anyway?"

Feeling that there was nothing to be gained by concealment, I replied:

"His name is Burbury, and I brought him along because he is very interested in this sort of thing."

"I see," said Mr. Yorke, but plainly he didn't.

There were novels, treatises on *magick*, collections of poems, drawings, pamphlets, and a large ledger, which seemed to be a sort of address book. It was taken for granted that I had come with the intention of being helpful in the matter of publication. And, indeed, I did not see why I should not be if the stuff turned out to be possible. In the end we went off with an armful of manuscripts and the ledger.

Mr. Yorke spoke warmly of Crowley and evidently had a considerable regard for him. To do him justice he succeeded in reducing the whole matter to an everyday level. Both Viv and I were disappointed by his business-like tone. It occurred to me that neither he nor Crowley had greeted me with "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." I was particularly glad that Mr. Yorke hadn't for I was certain that if I had been able to bring myself to make the

proper response of "Love is the Law, love under Will", Viv with his ribald sense of humour would have asked:

"Who is Will?"

Then I remembered having once heard Crowley and the Polish countess greet each other in that formula. They said it in the perfunctory tone that Germans used to say "Heil Hitler", as though it was a nuisance but you had to say it. As we were leaving, Mr. Yorke said: "By the way, are you going to brass up? The Beast is in rather low water."

"I'll see." I answered. "Good night."

During the next few days we read as much as we could of the manuscripts, only to find, as I had expected, that it was not the sort of thing which any publisher we knew of would handle. One thing, however, was a magnificent exception. Not that it was publishable. Indeed, it was more unpublishable than all the rest put together. This was the large ledger.

It was Crowley's address book for the years between 1907 and 1914. It contained several hundred names and addresses many of which were those of people of both sexes well known in public life. There were mysterious annotations and symbols against most of the names. I can only remember the two which occurred most frequently. They were "Obsessed" and a date, followed by "Released" and another date. I recalled the celebrated book of names that Pemberton Billing had produced in Court during a case in which he was involved in about 1920. It contained a list of public people who, he said, were guilty of high treason or addiction to drugs, or both. The publication of either of these books would have led to a splendid rumpus on the largest possible scale. I can remember some of the names of those who were "obsessed" and "released", because I had met their owners, or seen frequent references to them in the papers. I long to mention just one or two. The temptation is strong—but prudence is stronger.

I wrote to Mr. Yorke expressing my regret at not being able to help, and returned him all the material. I heard from him again once or twice, but our correspondence lapsed many years ago. He seemed to me a sensible, plain-speaking sort of man. Indeed, when I had at one point hinted that Crowley possibly had some power over him he laughed and said he merely regarded the whole thing as an amusing hobby. What he can have thought of us I cannot imagine. . . .

Some years later Viv recalled having received a dispatch about

Soviet penetration in Tibet near the Indian frontier. In it there was a reference to "Mr. Aleister Crowley", whose reputation was doubtless well known to Mr. Burbury. "He claims to have explored and climbed hitherto unconquered heights in the area, and if it is thought desirable for Mr. Burbury to write to Mr. Crowley, useful information might be obtained."

However, Viv's immediate superior at the Foreign Office said sharply: "On no account should you make any kind of approach to that person, who knows only too well that if ever he sets foot in this country he will be in prison within twenty-four hours."

One warm autumn evening Charles Spencer and I were standing on the long balcony of Claude Prescott's studio in Cheyne Walk. (Claude Prescott is Charles's wife.) We were talking, as usual, about the eternal verities and kindred elusive topics, when I happened to mention Aleister Crowley. At the sound of that name, Charles, whose conversation is often very dramatic, silenced me with an upheld finger and wordlessly conveying "Ah! Wait a *moment*! That has rung quite a bell!" He turned back into the studio, and a moment later returned with a small round box in his hand.

"At one time," he began, "my professional affairs used frequently to take me to a steep hill leading from the Strand down to the river."

This was his way of referring to the Gate Theatre in Villiers Street, of which he had a year earlier ceased to be a director, after a painful lawsuit that he won—an empty victory. He went on to tell me that one evening after the play he had been waylaid by a member of the audience who was insistent that he should accompany him to the *Café Royal* where a magician was awaiting them.

"Of course I'd heard of Crowley, but had never seen him. Out of curiosity I went, wondering what on earth he could want with me." Charles gave me one of his most zestful mysterious glances. "I must say he wasn't in the least what I expected a magician to be like. He was sitting at one of the marble-topped tables in the *brasserie*, drinking absinthe. With him were two rather tarty-looking middle-aged women. He looked like a successful stockbroker who had bought himself a castle in the Highlands. For when he stood up I saw that he was dressed in a kilt and plaid. I didn't take to him, and I liked him still less when I learned the reason of his wanting to meet me. He told me in confidential undertones that he had an immense knowledge of

strange medicines, and he had invented an ointment that instantly aroused sexual desire in any woman who smelt it. All a man had to do was to rub a little in his hair, behind his ears, or on his hands, and the moment a woman smelt it, she was his! He produced some little boxes and handed me one—this one. I opened it. The smell was—unexpected.” Charles held it out to me.

I smelt it. It still had a faint but distinct smell—far from “nameless”. Crowley, it seemed, told Charles that it was compounded of all the excretions and exhalations of the human body.

“H’m,” I said, and sniffed again.

“Yes, *all*,” went on Charles, “and, I was of course not surprised to learn, a Secret Ingredient.”

I handed the box back.

“Tell me, Charles, did you ever try this excretory ointment?”

“No, dear boy. No. I wouldn’t have known whether it had worked or not. I have never required any artificial assistance in these matters.”

“And so——?”

“Oh, Crowley wanted me to help him form a company to sell the stuff.”

“And did you?”

“No,” answered Charles airily, and threw the box on to a table.

Between 1928 and 1931 Aleister Crowley wrote me four more letters. In each there was the question whether I was willing to stand aside and let the enemies of Adonai pursue their persecution. This question, taken in its context, seemed to mean would I send him some money.

I might have done if I had had any to spare, but I had not. In 1929 he sent me a huge volume of his magazine *The Equinox*, bound in white buckram. It is an enormous book, printed and illustrated “regardless”, as they say. There are many full-page plates in colour, containing symbols. But of what they are symbols I cannot tell. There are photographs of a naked man with his face blanked-out, striking attitudes, also presumably symbolic. In two of them he is wearing a small apron. Under them is written “The Ibis”, “The God”, “The Thunderbolt”, “The Dragon”, and so on. The title page says that “*The Equinox*” is “The Official Organ of the A ∴ A ∴”. For a split second I read this as the Automobile Association, but the next line announces that it is “The Review of Scientific Illuminism”.

I could give an account of everything in this volume, but doubtless there are copies of it to be seen all over the place. All I will say is that I could make little or nothing of most of it. The blasphemy, of which there is a liberal supply, can be understood by anybody. So can the long story by Frank Harris entitled “The Magic Glasses”. The dissertation on the procuring and uses of certain dangerous drugs such as Cannabis (or Amido-Cannabinolactone  $C_{11}H_{11}O_2NH_2$ ) is not without a certain interest. But the order of magical religious services only produces bewilderment in an ordinary reader. Sometimes in the midst of pages and pages of rigmarole there suddenly leaps out at one a paragraph so completely out of keeping with the context that one can only burst out laughing. I choose one at random.

*The Mantra goes just 30 times a minute, 1800 times an hour, 43,200 times a day. To say it a million times would take longer than Mrs. Glynn's heroine did to conceive. Yet I will get the result if I have to say it a hundred and eleven million times. But oh! fertilise my Akastic egg today!*

As I read this I seemed to hear it in Crowley’s cockney accents, but its ribaldry did nothing to modify the tangible menace that seemed to hang about the pages.

The other day I picked up a more recent piece of Aleister Crowley’s work. It is called *Thumbs up! A Pentagram—a Pantacle to Win the War, by the Beast 666*, and is dated “July 23rd, 1941, e.v.”. It is one of a hundred copies and signed by Aleister Crowley, at the Abbey of Thelema, Rainbow Valley, Palomar Mountains, California. It consists of the mixture very much as before, only this time with references to Churchill and Roosevelt, as well as Osiris.

Another scrap which floated towards me not long ago from a second-hand bookseller is apparently an attack on G. K. Chesterton, and is entitled *Why Jesus Wept*. I will say no more. Incidentally there is a large bright red photograph of Crowley staring hypnotically at one opposite the title page of the pantacle to win the war. He has on his head what appears to be a gigantic mushroom.

A year or two ago, I forget exactly when, he returned to England. He was not arrested as had been threatened. He died at Hastings. I was told that he had with him a doctor who had been in attendance on him for some years, and who, said my informant, used to keep him

supplied with some rare drug on which he depended. Crowley is said to have threatened the doctor that if he allowed him to die, he, the doctor, would die within twenty-four hours. I was thrilled to hear that the doctor *had* died twenty-four hours after Crowley.

Whether this is so or not I have no idea, but I have no difficulty in believing it. I am convinced in my own mind that Aleister Crowley knew a lot of things. But they are things that I, personally, do not wish to know.

While I stayed in Cassis he seemed to be always on the brink of proposing a magical session of some kind. However, nothing more supernatural happened than the casting of my horoscope. He told me a number of things about myself and promised to post the completed thing to me in England. It arrived when I had been home about a fortnight, and is a very curious document, containing a number of predictions which later were fulfilled. One, however, was not. He wrote: "By the way, you will oblige me personally, by dying at the age of forty-five." I was then thirty-two. I am now sixty.

I feel that perhaps it is not a harsh judgement to say that he was not a good man. But he never did me any harm.

Perhaps he wasn't a very good magician either. . . .

ESMOND HARMSWORTH

**I**N the spring of 1928 I had my first glimpse of a world I had only read of. I went for a week-end to stay at Mereworth Castle, in Kent. Some years earlier I had met Lady Lacon through Frank and Mary MacNalty. Lady Lacon's eldest daughter, Peggy, was married to the Hon. Esmond Harmsworth (now Lord Rothermere), whom I had seen only once before, when he came to dine in a Royal Air Force mess when I was in the Service. I remembered him as the most debonair young man I had ever seen. He was very tall and his clothes were superbly cut. He looked extremely rich, happy, and confident. He had the air of one who not only knows that the world is his oyster, but has already opened it with easy skill, and found it simply crammed with pearls.

When I saw him again, against his family background at Mereworth Castle, he seemed even taller, happier, more debonair and well-dressed than ever. He came across a room to greet me and another guest with the air of a good-humoured young king on an informal occasion. Yet there was a subtle difference between him and a king. Kings are obliged to accept life as they find it, and like, or appear to like, what they do, rather than do what they like. Men such as Esmond Harmsworth can do what they like, can have ideas, and make things happen. That is what gives them, in spite of a superficial similarity, a livelier, more vital appearance than that of kings.

His wife, Peggy, was rather quiet and matter-of-fact. She had a way of looking at people, and then looking away with a private smile, as though an unspoken but slightly amusing thought had occurred to her.

What fun they had! I have known other wealthy men, but none of them enjoyed themselves with a fraction of the urbane zest of Esmond Harmsworth. To appreciate the possibilities that lie open to one if one

between vanity and conceit. Vanity can be recognised by its owner and taken into account. Conceit blinds its owner and prevents him having a true vision of himself or anyone else. Ah! How then can he ever be aware that he is conceited? A very nice question, and one, I think, which can only be answered by reading his autobiography.

I believe that no one has yet written a completely true, because completely impartial, autobiography, having seen himself from the inside as well as from the outside, and having allowed for the fact that a mind looking inward at itself is looking at a mind that is not the same as a mind which is not looking inward at itself. At one end of the scale you have the preposterous autobiographies of such people as Rousseau and Frank Harris, full of windy boastings about things that couldn't have happened; while at the other end there are books like the superb autobiographies of H. G. Wells and Robert Graves. But even these latter are imperfect by reason of many omissions. In the circumstances, it could not have been otherwise. But I believe that it can be done. An artist should always be trying to create his masterpiece. Self-portraits of painters have sometimes been masterpieces.

The present book is by way of a trial flight in a school machine, before attempting, one day before I die, a world-flight in an atom-driven jet not yet off the drawing-board.

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